

Chapter 6: Organization of Things, Time, and Due Dates

Teacher Organization

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Introduction

One of the most important aspects of keeping the classroom running smoothly is to ensure that the teacher is organized. If there is constant downtime from the teacher needing to shuffle through papers, make copies, or hand out materials, then the students are more likely to get distracted and start chatting or escalating behaviors into areas that make it more difficult to get them ready to work again. In order to prevent this from happening, it's crucial that the teacher has a personal organizational system that allows him or her to quickly find any and all materials needed, as well as to access daily plans.

Class Materials

Keeping the various class materials organized is step number one to having a smoothly running classroom. After all, if the teacher can't keep track of things, then the students will suffer for having excessive downtime while the teacher attempts to find or distribute materials that should have been prepared before class.

Keeping materials separated by class period, level, or content area is one way to begin. Retaining those habits from school days, binders can work wonders for keeping resources organized. They allow for customization such as tabs to mark different sections, and easily changeable order. If new resources are found, then it is a breeze to throw them into a plastic protector and keep the master copies of papers clean and crisp for future copies.

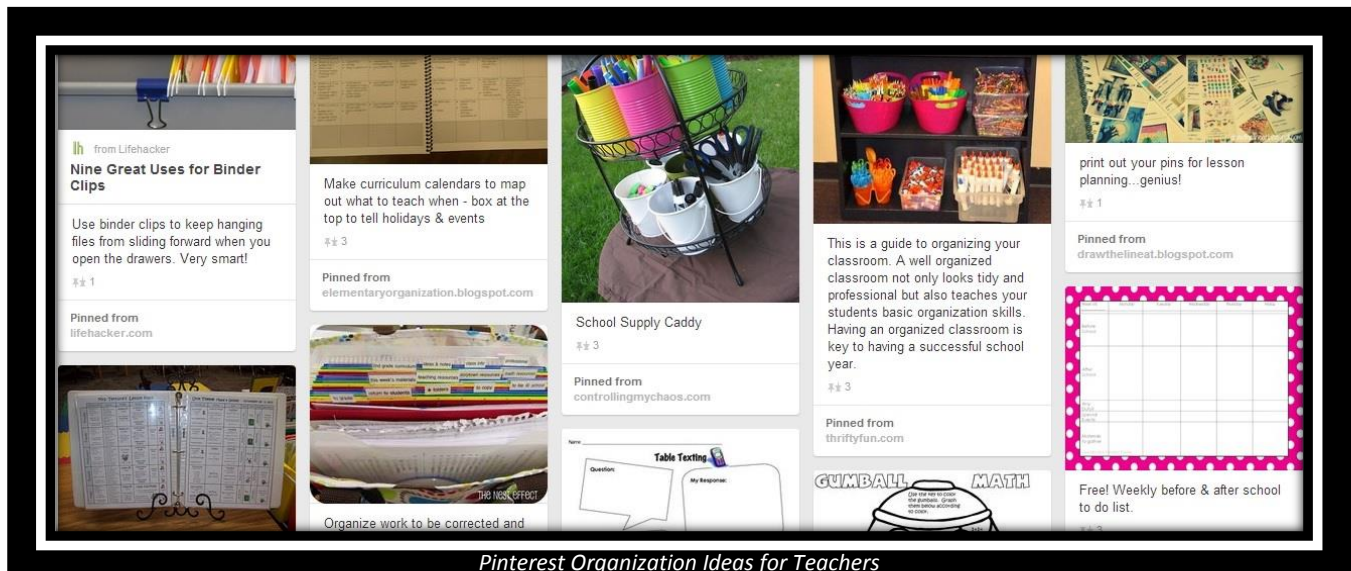
Having those clean copies can save face as well, such as when an activity takes far less time than planned. Instead of pointlessly stalling (and all of the students knowing it), the binder has a trusty activity from last year that hasn't been done yet this year, but relates quite well that the students can move on to - all as if it had been planned. Smooth move! Furthermore, having a system of binders like this one can help substitute teachers as well in times when they need to fill in.

One teacher at Sanborn Regional High School in New Hampshire, Dee Dunbar-Hambucken, says that for her it works to "keep levels separate, and organize lesson plans by color" (D. Dunbar-Hambucken, personal communication, March 23, 2014). Color coding is a tried-and-true method, and it works for those who have a strong preference for visual techniques. By keeping each class a separate color, it becomes quite easy to identify which binder is needed for which class or day. This can help prevent that gut-wrenching moment when a glance into the trusty teacher's bag reveals that, "Oh no, I brought the binder for a *GOLD* day and today is a *BLUE* day!" moment. If only they had been color-coded, it would have been a simple matter to grab the gold colored binder instead of hoping that the flat black cover of this one would reveal the plans for the correct day.

Handouts

Imagine this scene: A teacher, just a few years away from retirement. His home office is overflowing with binders, which are overflowing with papers themselves. So much so, in fact, that they simply cannot contain the mass of handouts and substitute plans that he has gathered throughout his career. In a hurry one morning, he rushes to his home office to find that particular stack of papers that he remembers using three years ago in a unit like this one. He recalls having placed them about halfway down a stack by his computer, but as he works to slide out the few pages that he needs, the stack wobbles, topples, his eyes flash, the papers crash - well, as much as paper *can* crash - and his students have a substitute that day for class.

In order to prevent that from happening to any non-imaginary teachers, it is crucial to consider how he got to that point. Over the years, as knowledge of what works and what doesn't grows, so too do the handouts that a teacher has at his or her fingertips. The wealth of knowledge makes it hard to throw any away, because surely, that one paper used to such great success will be relevant again soon, no really, it will. However, while waiting for that satisfying moment to return, teachers need to develop a better method for keeping their many handouts organized.



Pinterest Organization Ideas for Teachers

Luckily, it's much easier in this technological age to avoid having the many stacks of papers, the storage buckets of binders past, and the endless paper cuts. One of the easiest quick-tips is to simply scan any papers that are used consistently in lessons into a personal laptop or computer and back them up to a system of folders on an external hard drive or cloud-based drive. These folders can be organized in much the same way as the color-coded binders. However, now with the added functionality of sorting by date or modification date on a computer, keeping track of various materials becomes even easier. Some suggested methods for ordering:

- Alphabetical by topic, standard, etc. This will help when working with a particular standard by knowing where materials that address it are.
- Year used (2013-14, 1981-82). This will help decide what things are still current and applicable and what things might be able to be disposed of.
- Class used (18th Century English, English as a Foreign Language). This will help when re-teaching a course or a similar course to get ideas on what worked the previous time(s).

- level of class/students (8th grade, AP English, ELL/ESL)

There are so many other methods that could be used, but each teacher is different in terms of how he or she keeps materials organized and accessible, as proven by [this Pinterest board](#) with countless ideas on classroom and teacher organization. With digital materials, it becomes even easier to sort through, search through, and maintain. These can be accessed from anywhere if uploaded to a cloud-based storage (such as SkyDrive or Google Drive) so when the wrong binder is in the bag, materials can be quickly obtained between classes by downloading and printing it off right there.

Another point to remember is that sometimes, it really is time to let go. Materials that worked ten years ago might not be as relevant or useful now. Dee Dunbar-Hambucken mentions her experiences with this as well: “It’s kind of crazy, though, because what worked even two years ago with freshman doesn’t work anymore” (D. Dunbar-Hambucken, personal communication, March 23, 2014). Keep an eye on moving forward with what new resources you can find. One method to keeping track of internet resources is to use a social bookmarking site such as [Delicious](#) which allows users to tag and comment on their links, as well as see who else has linked that website and browse through their public links. This can help immensely in finding new resources to replace the outdated ones.

The teacher from the first paragraph was fine, by the way. After all, it *was* just paper, so while it was heavy, he was okay. Not even a paper cut on him. But, rest assured, he began using some of the techniques just covered in this section.

Agenda or Assignment Book

Using an agenda or assignment book to keep track of plans for each class is also a basic step to keeping organized. Agendas can help teachers keep track of what is happening on each day for each class. Keeping these simple plans straight and organized in a visual form can save the day when one encounters a brain-fart. Read the subheading of *Time Management* to learn more about how to use and maintain agendas.

Classroom Organization

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Keeping the classroom organized can save time both for the teacher and the students. When students know where to get certain materials, it means that they don’t have to ask the other students or the teacher and can advocate for their own ability. It also prevents them from getting the chance to use it as an excuse with the all too familiar “I don’t have something I need for class...can I go get it from my locker?” To minimize repetition of instructions and wasted class time, setting up clearly organized areas in the classroom and getting students used to and familiar with them can provide extra minutes to be used well.

Creating Routines

Routines are a wonderful way to facilitate classroom management of common questions and activities such as bathroom breaks, absent students, and needed writing utensils. Set up these

routines and procedures early in the year and get the students used to following them. Publically thank students for using them correctly until it becomes common procedure.

Creating a sign out sheet for the bathroom allows students to quietly excuse themselves from the classroom, meaning they don't have to interrupt the flow of the learning by announcing their bodily needs (which really, is more comfortable for everybody). By having them write down the time that they left and arrived, it also makes it easy to keep track of who is taking an unduly long time and might need to be spoken to about the importance of class time.

Have a small set of drawers or containers that have commonly used classroom supplies, such as extra pencils, colored pencils, scissors, and possibly most importantly, lined paper for those students who are chronically without a notebook. Label the drawers so that the students know where everything is, and make sure to clarify which drawers are and are not appropriate for students to take materials from. For example, it might help to have the class materials on the opposite side of the room from the teacher's desk, so that students are not tempted to snag anything from there. Similarly, make sure to clearly establish whether students need to return items or not (such as extra pencils).

If there are any commonly used items in class, such as journals, having labeled baskets for each class in an easily accessible spot in the room can save on time since students will know exactly where they are and when they should have them. Keeping important and commonly used items in the room also ensures that students will not have the option of avoiding an activity because they do not have it.

Dr. Thomas Gordon, author of T.E.T.: Teacher Effectiveness Training, has many suggestions for what he refers to as simplifying the environment. One is having an in-out basket or tray for students' assignments, which helps cut down on those moments towards the end of class when students bombard the teacher with their papers, creating the possibility that it might be lost or forgotten (Gordon 166). The trays make it clear to students that they are responsible for getting their assignments into that tray to be counted. He also encourages the method of having filing systems for the students, and adds that check-out trays could help to ensure that materials are returned when needed (Gordon 166). Similar to the idea about the journals, he also suggests that teachers "put materials, books, tools, and equipment where students can reach them" (Gordon 165).

Extra Materials

For students who were absent or that ever-present student who loses the papers from one day to the next, it can be helpful to have designated spots for extra copies of papers that students need. Teachers could use a file system with a folder for each student so that if that student is absent, they can come in the next day and know exactly where they can find what they need. This can help stem the tide of that question that inevitably provokes either sarcasm or pain, depending on the day: "Did I miss anything?"

Works Cited

Gordon, Dr. Thomas. (1974). *T.E.T. Teacher Effectiveness Training*. New York, NY: Peter H. Wyden.

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